

HB Arnett's
COUGAR SPORTSLINE

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BYU FOOTBALL IN 2008 WILL BE UNBELIEVABLE, BUT NOT UNBLEMISHED

We love August and BYU football.

It is rah, rah, rah, 24-7.

It is always our best month of the year for subscriptions. That is because BYU is always undefeated in August.

This year there is a bonus. Not only are the Cougars still undefeated, they are also ranked 17th in the pre-season rankings of the USA Today Coaches poll. The last time BYU was ranked nationally in a pre-season poll was 1997. Coincidentally, they were also ranked 17th that year. They finished with a 6-5 record.

This month has the best BYU buzz we have heard in decades. We attribute it to the BCS talk in the air.

Did we mention that BYU is undefeated in August?

Better yet, we don't need to mention that the Cougars return 10 of 11 starters on offense.

Quite frankly, this is a team that could be absolutely scary good when every offensive play starts with the ball in Max Hall's hands.

In the 30 years we have been covering and observing BYU football, which includes all the glory years and a gang of good quarterbacks like Sheide, Nielsen, Wilson, McMahon, Young, Detmer etc, the best Cougar offense we ever saw was the one Gary Crowton put on the field in his first year as the head coach in 2001.

Prolific Passers

BYU has had some prolific passers, but it wasn't until they combined the passing game with a legitimate running attack in 2001, that they were virtually unstoppable.

In case you forgot, they were 12-0 until injuries to Brandon Doman and Luke Staley gutted the gravy train. The Cougars lost their last two games and finished with a 12-2 record.

What was really impressive in 2001 were the points put up by that BYU offense.

They scored 70 (Tulane), 52 (Nevada), 44 (Cal), 35 (UNLV), 54 (Utah State), 24 (New Mexico), 63 (Air Force), 59 (San Diego State), 56 (CSU), 41 (Wyoming), 24 (Utah), 41 (Miss State), 45 (Hawaii) and 10 (Louisville) in 14 games.

We also watched an equally great offense in 2004. It wasn't the Cougars'. It belonged to Utah and Alex Smith.

Here is how Utah scored in their 12 games. Texas A&M (41), Arizona (23), Utah State (48), Air Force (49), New Mexico (28), North Carolina (46), UNLV (63), SDSU (51), CSU (63), Wyoming (45), BYU (52) and Pittsburgh (35).

Barring every game being played in torrential rain, hurricane-like wind, a season-ending injury to Max Hall or the BYU offense averaging 5 turnovers a game, we would expect to see this BYU offense turn in those same type of point totals that the 2001 BYU and the 2004 Utah offense did.

Scary Good

That is our definition of scary good.

Barring a game in which BYU turns over the ball 5 or more times, our assessment of this 2008 Cougar offense is that any and all opponents on this year's schedule will need to score at least 31 points if they hope to have a chance to beat the Cougars.

If we are anywhere close on that assessment of this offense, this really could be an unbelievable season.,

We said that the expectations for this year's offense are unreal. While that is true, we also said that the Cougars' record wouldn't be unblemished.

We expect to see at least one loss again this season, despite an unbelievable offense.

We base that expectation on history and the fickleness of football.

In case you forgot, in 82 years of playing football, BYU has only had one undefeated season in its history. They were 13-0 and National Champs in 1984.

In those same 82 years, they have only had 5 seasons with just one loss. The Cougars were 8-1 in 1932, 11-1 in 1979, 12-1 in 1980, 11-1 in 1983, and 14-1 in 1996.

Conference Play

We expect to see BYU on the losing end of the scoreboard at least once this season. We also expect that loss to come in conference play.

Again, just look at history.

The past two seasons, BYU is 16-0 in MWC action. That is unbelievable and unsustainable.

It doesn't happen in any league over the long haul.

It shouldn't have happened in BYU's case over the last two years. During those 16 games, there were at least 5 contests that we can recall where it took unbelievable luck, providence, and or fortunate bounces and fumbles for BYU to escape with victories.

There were three conference games last season that could have gone either way. It really did take a fortuitous play against Utah to get a win. Had not New Mexico turned the ball over 5 times against the Cougars in Albuquerque, they could have very easily won that game.

In case you forgot, with less than three minutes on the clock, TCU was driving for the go-ahead score in Provo. The Cougar defense held up and the Cougars held on for a win.

We still buy all Bronco Mendenhall is selling, but we also buy into the reality of conference games.

Rare

It is extremely rare for a team to go back to back seasons without stumbling at least once against a conference team.

As a matter of fact, in the 46 years that BYU has been a member of the WAC and MWC, the Cougars have had just 6 seasons in which they went through league play undefeated. That happened in 79, 83, 84, 96, 06 and 07.

After just three years on the job as BYU's head coach, Mendenhall is already responsible for 33% of those undefeated league seasons.

That says something about him. Either he is an extremely good coach or the law of conference averages are about to catch up to him.

We don't expect an undefeated season for BYU this year. We expect at least one loss and we expect it to happen in league play.

That is the bad news. The good news is that while we don't know to which MWC team the loss will occur, we are sure it won't be to Utah.

That means the BYU-Utah match up will still be for an outright title or piece of the league hardware when the two square off on Nov. 22 in Salt Lake City.

That also means that the game will determine which team is headed to Las Vegas for a bowl game.

We don't expect either squad to be undefeated when they meet. That rules out any BCS bid and an invite to the Fiesta Bowl in Glendale on Jan 5 of 2009.

The winner of BYU-Utah should get the nod for a berth in the Las Vegas Bowl. That game is set for Saturday, Dec 20.

COUGAR CONFLICT

If BYU makes a fourth-straight appearance in the Las Vegas Bowl this year, there will be a scheduling conflict with BYU basketball.

BYU is slated to face Arizona State in Glendale at the University of Phoenix Stadium as part of a basketball doubleheader on the same day, Dec 20.

While the official BYU basketball schedule has not been released, at least some of the non-conference games for Dave Rose and his team are already known.

In addition to playing ASU in Arizona, the Cougars will also host Wake Forest in Provo, face Idaho State in Pocatello, meet Pepperdine in Malibu, face Tulsa in Oklahoma and match up against Long Beach State in Provo to open the season on Nov. 14.

A game against Weber State is set for Ogden and BYU and Utah State will play a game in December at Energy Solutions Arena in Salt Lake City in December.

NO SHOWS, PARTIAL SHOWS AND SHOWS

Let's start with those not showing in camp because of injuries. This especially impacts the linebacking corp.

Terrance Hooks, the junior middle linebacker, was ticketed for plenty of playing time this fall until he suffered a knee injury during this past spring. He is not listed on the current roster, but is still on the team and expected to return for next season.

A similar situation corresponds to sophomore outside linebacker Grant Nelson. He was going to back up David Nixon this season and saw minutes last year.

Because of renal ramifications, he will be undergoing surgery soon and will miss the entire year while recovering.

It didn't seem like a big deal when jc linebacker recruit Tolu Moala of El Camino JC in California, was released from his letter of intent by BYU because of academic issues. Moala, a returned LDS missionary, couldn't get into BYU, but had no problems getting into Oklahoma State.

With the linebacker injuries, even before camp starts, his release is now being felt on the roster.

Speaking of no-shows revisited, the inability of BYU coaches to reel in Uona Kavienga last February, has turned up the spotlight on BYU's inability to consistently land the big LDS fish.

Kavienga, who said he was going to sign with BYU, only to renege and sign with USC, just reopens old recruiting wounds and is even more painful now with the lack of depth at linebacker.

There are two other no-shows.

Atem Bol, the wide receiver recruit from Texas, did not qualify academically and is reportedly going to enroll at Snow College. He will need an AA degree before he can matriculate at BYU.

Seta Pohahau, the highly touted running back from California, was also an academic casualty, but reportedly, not by much. He just missed achieving the necessary test score and will try again between now and January, when he hopes to be able to enroll at BYU.

Part of the no-shows for this fall camp include two missing missionaries. They were both part of the most recent recruiting class. Austin Holt and Jake Murphy will both serve LDS missions before enrolling in school. Holt is a tight end from Bingham HS in Utah and Murphy, who is the son of former baseball player, Dale Murphy, is a wide receiver from American Fork HS in Utah.

Holt is ticketed for two years in St. Louis and Murphy will be down under for service in Sydney, Australia.

Partial Shows

Austin Collie is on campus and was on the field for the start of fall camp, but he is not available for any serious action or practice because of a recently diagnosed stress fracture in his leg.

The prognosis is that he will miss 2-3 weeks and be back and good to go.

Another linebacker is a partial show. Matt Bauman, the junior from Salt Lake, injured his foot while riding a scooter. He is expected to miss some time early in fall camp.

Bernard Afutiti is also in camp, but can't participate. The junior college defensive end is still awaiting academic paperwork from his previous jc.

Shows

There is only one real show for BYU this season and it is all about the quarterback. It is the same script as in years past when BYU was good.

The show this year is Max Hall. As he plays and performs, so go the Cougars.

Fortunately for the junior signal caller, he has a phenomenal supporting cast to back him up. Harvey Unga, Austin Collie, Dennis Pitta and a very good offensive line, should help this show be a major smash with big-time reviews and plenty of wins.

Previews

Once this team gets a week of real practice under its belt, we will begin next week detailing depth charts, freshmen who will have to play and a breakdown of the plusses and minuses of this team.

BASKETBALL BRIEFS

There has been a little surge in the regional hype for two BYU basketball prospects.

We mentioned a week ago that Brandon Davies, the senior 6-9 post man from Provo HS and his teammate, junior Kyle Collinsworth both had outstanding spring and summer tournaments.

Davies really elevated his game and consequently, his recruiting radar signal has been expanded.

A lot of major schools across the country are now showing interest in Davies and Collinsworth.

Those schools include west coast mainstays, Gonzaga, ASU, USC and Washington State.

For some, the emergence of the Provo HS duo has come as a surprise. Not so for BYU coaches who have been on the recruiting trail for these two players for the last four years.

Trust us when we say that when it comes to LDS basketball prospects, there are no secrets for this BYU staff. There may be an occasional evaluation mistake, but there are no secrets.

The biggest evaluation mistake recently was with JC Carroll, who was not offered by BYU and signed

with Utah State.

That mistake was not made by Dave Rose. It was another Steve Cleveland assistant who made the trip to Evanston to evaluate Carroll and returned to tell Cleveland that Carroll couldn't play.

Davies

Davies is a concern for BYU. The concern is not his play, but his academics. He still needs work to be able to qualify for Division I basketball.

While Davies is a priority, Tyler Haws is still numero uno when it comes to BYU's recruiting interests for this year.

Haws was invited to several prestigious national camps this summer and did nothing but improve his stock.

He also spend a lot of time this summer playing with his Lone Peak HS team.

The most recent appearance with his team was at the Honda Classic at Kansas City in mid July. Lone Peak went 5-2 and lost the championship on a last second 35 foot game winner.

In game 1, Haws had 19 points and 13 rebounds. Game 2 saw him score 29 points and pull down 9 rebounds. In game three, Haws was perfect from the line, 3-4 from three point land and scored 31 points and had six boards.

Game 4 had Haws sitting out the entire fourth quarter, but he still managed 30 points and 7 rebounds.

Game 5 was more of the same. He had 26 points, 5 boards and 3 steals. Game 6 was his biggest scoring outing. He had 41 points.

In the final, Lone Peak was playing its third game in six hours. Haws finished with 30 points, 8 boards, 4 assists and 2 steals. For the seven games in KC, Haws averaged 29.4 per game and had 7.8 rebounds per outing.

BYU Team Camp

Haws, Davies and Collinsworth also played against each other this summer at BYU's team camp.

Lone Peak defeated Provo 47-34. Haws had 21 in that game. Provo HS wasn't the only team Lone Peak and Haws lit up at BYU.

The Knights beat Bountiful 52-24. Haws scored 23. Against Alta, a 46-31 win, Haws had 27 points, 8 boards and 3 steals.

Blackfoot HS from Idaho was next. The held Haws to just 10. Of course he only played 10 minutes as the 70-45 final score would indicate.

Haws only had 12 points against Tooele in limited time. The final: Lone Peak 60, Tooele 18.

Springville held him to 24 points and 7 boards in a 49-37 Lone Peak win. Timpview also lost to Lone Peak 44-29 with Haws having 12 points. Against Olympus, he scored 22 in a 63-42 win.

While Dave Rose spent a lot of time in Las Vegas looking at Provo players Davies and Collinsworth, he also found time to continue to follow Jordan Ellis, the 6-1 point guard from North Medford HS in Oregon. He plays for the Oregon Rebels AAU team. It appears BYU's recruiting interest in Ellis is real, but the question is where will they find a scholarship for him?

Another name to watch is Ian Haward, a super skinny 6-10 post player from Orem HS. He was hurt for most of his junior season, but has performed well this spring and summer. He reportedly would like to play at BYU, but Dave Rose and staff have not extended an offer as yet.

He does have an offer from Utah State. He will go on an LDS mission before enrolling anywhere and shouldn't show up on a roster until 2011.

TRACKING TIMO

BYU now has 11 verbal commitments for the coming recruiting class. The latest to say yes to the Cougars is Ryan Mulitalo, a 6-3, 285 pound offensive lineman from Hunter HS in Salt Lake.

Here is the latest list: Mulitalo; Remington Peck, 6-5, 215, TE, Bingham HS, UT; Anthony Heimuli, 5-11, 225, RB, Mt. View HS, UT; Mitch Mathews, 6-5, 200, WR, Southridge HS, OR; Trevor Bateman, 5-11, 180, DB, Palm Desert HS, CA; Peni Maka'afi, 5-10, 215, RB, Northridge HS, UT; Tui Crichton, 6-4, 280, OL, Timpview HS, UT; Terry Alletto, 6-3, 260, Ponderosa HS, CO; Craig Bills, 6-2, 205, DB, Timpview HS, UT; Jray Galea'i, 6-0, 170, Kahuku HS, HI and Adam Timo, 6-1, 185, RB, Snow Canyon HS, UT.

We still think the diamond of this class will be Timo. He will be a big-time running back in college. He didn't get the press he deserved last season as a junior because he had a new coach who implemented a new spread offense. He also plays in St. George and that precludes major media coverage along the Wasatch Front.

This year, those living in the Salt Lake and Provo areas, can see for themselves how good Timo is.

He will play three games early this season in Salt Lake and Orem.

Snow Canyon opens its season against East HS in Salt Lake on August 22. They then will travel to Orem the next week, Aug 29, to take on the Tigers of Orem HS.

They open at home Sept 5 against Las Vegas HS in St. George and then return to Orem on Sept 12 to face Timpanogos HS.

TELEVISION TIMETABLE

BYU vs. Northern Iowa

Saturday, Aug 30 at Provo

Kickoff: 4:00 PM Mountain Time

TV: Mtn

BYU vs. Washington

Saturday, Sep 6 at Seattle

Kickoff: 1:00 PM Mountain Time

TV: Fox Sports Northwest and Fox Sports Utah

BYU vs. UCLA

Saturday, Sep 13 at Provo

Kickoff: 1:30 PM Mountain Time

TV: Versus

BYU vs. Wyoming

Saturday, Sep 20 at Provo

Kickoff: 1:00 PM Mountain Time

TV: Mtn

BYU vs. Utah State

Friday, Oct 3 at Logan

Kickoff: TBA

TV: TBA

BYU vs. New Mexico

Saturday, Oct 11 at Provo

Kickoff: 4:00 PM Mountain Time

TV: Mtn

BYU vs. TCU

Thursday, Oct 16 at Fort Worth

Kickoff: 6:00 PM Mountain Time

TV: Versus

BYU vs. UNLV

Saturday, Oct 25 at Provo

Kickoff: Noon Mountain Time

TV: Mtn

BYU vs. Colorado State

Saturday, Nov 1 at Fort Collins

Kickoff: 4:00 PM Mountain Time

TV: Mtn

BYU vs. San Diego State

Saturday, Nov 8 at Provo

Kickoff: Noon Mountain Time

TV: Mtn

BYU vs. Air Force

Saturday, Nov 15 at Colorado Springs

Kickoff: 1:30 PM Mountain Time

TV: CBS C

BYU vs. Utah

Saturday, Nov 22 at Salt Lake

Kickoff: 4:00 PM Mountain Time

TV: Mtn